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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Drama and Theatre in an Insecured State: Engaging the New Media in Search of Peace

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Abstract

For more than a decade now, Nigeria has been beset by a plethora of insecurity crises that threaten the corporate existence of the state. The politicisation of most of these crises has even complicated the security situation to a bewildering sophistication. Security operatives as well as relevant stakeholders have been busy developing various strategies to bring about peace in the country. However, despite the fact that the art, through drama and theatre particularly, has been influential in different societies as a creative apparatus not just to conscientise the people about problems affecting their daily lives but also as a means to proffer solutions to such problems, in Nigeria, these art forms are not explored and engaged in the search for peace in the beleaguered state. They are often neglected and stripped of their veracity for problem solving capacity. However, in the era of the new media, replete with platforms that stimulate interactivity, this study argues that drama and theatre, if fully explored, could also be a feasible tool in the search for peace in Nigeria. It is the submission of this study that when dramatists are effusively engaged by security operatives and dedicated social media platforms are created online for them to upload their creative products, the search for peace would become more instructive, pleasurable and demystified.

Key Words: Drama, Theatre, Insecurity, New Media and Peace

Introduction

The security situation in Nigeria as a state has consistently been a source of serious concern for all stakeholders in search of peace. From religious/ ethnic crises to militancy, Boko Haram to now farmers-herdsmen crisis, kidnapping and cultism, peace has evaded Nigeria as a state. The search for peace in this endangered state has become imperative in such a way that synergy between institutions, disciplines, experts across fields in conjunction with the security operatives is required. The security crisis in Nigeria has even assumed an appalling stage such that each geo-political zone is bedeviled by one security problem almost unique to it. In the North East, Boko Haram terrorist activities have continued to make life miserable for the people of the region while in the North West, kidnapping and cattle rustling are on the rise. In the North Central, farmers-herdsmen clashes have been the bane of peaceful co-existence among the people just as militancy, kidnapping and cultism characterise the security threat in the South South region while the South East is the beehive of agitation for secession by Biafran protesters. In the South West, farmers-herders clashes and kidnapping have been the bane of peace in the region.

The security quagmire has actually stretched the Nigeria security apparatus beyond its elastic point where extreme use of force is no longer yielding positive results as the country gasp for peace. This is even as miscreants have also advanced their craft to combat the forces with almost more terror than anticipated. This is evident as Nigerian army continues to lose her men in war front against Boko Haram and even during the time of militancy in the Niger-Delta. Nevertheless, while the fight against the various security contraventions intensifies, various criminal activities emerge in different forms which call for a redefinition in the approach in the search for peace in Nigeria.

Drama and theatre, therefore, present a good opportunity to Nigeria in her search for peace. The

art forms are potent tools for the communication of ideas and messages that could conscientise the people about the security challenges bedeviling the country. While the conventional mass media platforms used by National Orientation Agency (NOA) to disseminate messages in verbal forms could fall on deaf ears, drama and theatre take the messages to the people in subtle graphic representation in such a way that the audience could easily relate with. And when the audience relate with experiences on stage, the success of the messages is easily enhanced. This is why drama and theatre is thought to be an alternative media which stakeholders could adopt in search of peace in Nigeria.

The success of these performing arts would be more likely when the potential posed by the new media is properly engaged. The new media which enhance social interaction among people at the same time in different locations in form of Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Skype, Instagram, and Twitter can be utilised by dramatists to communicate relevant messages on insecurity and the way forward. This can have a fast and wider spread rather than even assembling in theatres, listening to a radio or tuning to a television channel. However, in as much as drama and theatre could offer good potential in the search for peace in an insecure state like Nigeria, it is unfortunate that the media has not been fully harnessed while Nigeria as a state gasps for peace. Again, while the new media offer a good platform for dramatists to propagate messages of peace using their plays, the media have so far not been fully explored for the purpose of promoting peace.

This paper examines the veracity of drama and theatre in search of peace in a beleaguered Nigerian state. The thought here is that when dramatists through play skits and community theatre dramas recorded and uploaded on social media platforms exposing the causes and devastating effects of insecurity and crisis in Nigeria, the audience would easily relate with the messages and seek to tread the path of peace. The engagement of the new media platforms in dramatic representation of Nigerian security quandary is thus seen by the researchers as a sine qua non to achieving peace.

The Concepts of Drama and Theatre

Actually, drama, as in plays and the theatre, has changed over time. The word itself comes from an ancient Greek word *dran* meaning 'act', 'to do' or 'deed'. The Ancient Greek philosopher, **Aristotle** used this term in a very influential treatise called the ***Poetics***. In fact, it is with the Greeks and Romans that a definition of classical drama started. Among the Greeks and Romans, **drama** was more than just acting out a story. These plays were highly symbolic and included music, dance, poetry, and audience participation. In this text, Aristotle classified different forms of poetry according to basic features he thought could be commonly recognised in their composition. He used the term 'drama' to describe poetic compositions that were 'acted' in front of audiences in a **theatre**. Aristotle therefore offered drama as a general term to describe forms of poetry that were acted (Greene, 1994, p.32).Aristotle suggested that some forms of poetry could be identified as 'dramas' because they had written compositions that represented 'men acting' and the presentation of the compositions required men to act as the men represented in the texts. Aristotle argued that dramatic texts and performances imitate actions or deeds performed by people in real life. He called the process of imitation he identified in the dramas he analysed ***mimesis***. This concept has sometimes been used to suggest that written compositions that are 'acted' offer representations of activities that *copy* reality in some way. However, Aristotle's arguments can also suggest that dramas offer quite unique kinds of poetry because they use real actions, ideas and texts to construct *possible* views of reality which when harnessed in the search of peace can offer a positive result as they may conscientise people about their reality which they can easily relate.

Theatre comes from the ancient Greek word *theatron* meaning *seeing place.* It is a place where dramatic compositions were acted out before the audience. As an artistic concept today, theatre is not

just a building or a place where dramatic performances are presented to the audience. It is a conglomeration of several artistic components that are combined to tell a story before an audience on the stage. **Drama** could be a play that can be performed for theatre, radio or even television. They are usually written out as a **script** or a written version of a play that is read by the actors but not the audience. The idea of theatre, therefore, comes in when such plays are performed before the audience using the various artistic ornaments such as costume, makeup, light and props which enhance the smooth interpretation of the story. Theatre, thus, is an interpretation of dramatic performances by actors on stage before the audience. According to Aristotle, it is through theatre that a unique kind of poetry is offered to the audience because they use real actions, props, ideas and texts to construct *possible* views of reality (*Poetics*).

The New Media

New media is a catch-all term used for various kinds of electronic communications that are conceivable due to innovation in computer technology. New media is comprised of websites, online video/audio streams, email, online social platforms, online communities, online forums, blogs, Internet telephony, Web advertisements, online education and much more (Mitchell & Holcomb, 2016, p.22). The *New Media Institute* (2017 n.p) also defines the term "new media" as a catch-all term used to define all that is related to the Internet and the interplay between technology, images and sound. Further, the organisation contends that "New media can be characterised by the variegated use of images, words, and sounds. These networks of images, sounds, and text data are different from old media formats such as hardcopy newspapers because of the *nesting characteristic*." Again, *PC Magazine* **(**2018, n.p**)** defines "new media" as "forms of communication in the digital world, which include publishing... most significantly, over the Internet. It implies that the user obtains the material via desktop and laptop computers, smartphones and tablets. Every company in the developed world is involved with new media."

Based on these definitions, it can be inferred that the new media is concerned with producing and presenting contents to the public through the use of the Internet which enhances public interaction and convergence. Thus the importance of the new media in the communication of ideas in the 21st century cannot be underestimated. These New methods of communication in the digital world allow a large group of people to congregate online and share, sell and swap goods and information. It also allows more people to have a voice in their community and in the world in general. They are consumed on cell phones, laptops, desktops and tablets and they often contain the same information as the traditional media, although it may be delivered in a different style with a wider coverage.

The new media environment is dynamic and continues to develop in novel, sometimes in unanticipated ways that have serious consequences for democratic governance and politics. New media have radically altered the way that government institutions operate, the way that political leaders communicate, the manner in which elections are contested, and citizen engagement (Mitchell & Holcomb, 2016, p.24). The new media have thus brought about novel ways of developing and shaping ideas on issues affecting the society through its power of interactivity and connectivity at an alarming speed. This is even as Stroud (2011, p.30) argued that media generally is designed to deliver general information to broad audience joined by different sources that narrowcast to discrete users. There can be a symbiotic relationship between drama, theatre and the new media which, if carefully explored, would support the search for peace in a beleaguered Nigerian state.

Insecurity in Nigeria

Nigeria as a state is today being precariously bedeviled by a myriad of security challenges which requires desperate measures to mitigate the

incursion. This security situation has actually been a serious threat to national corporate existence. Boko Haram insurgency, in more than a decade now, has killed many lives, displaced more than half a million, destroyed hundreds of schools and government buildings and devastated an already ravaged economy in the North East: one of Nigeria's poorest regions. It over stretches federal security services, with no end in sight just yet. It has spilled over to other parts of the north and risks reaching Niger, Chad and Cameroon; weak countries poorly equipped to combat a radical Islamist armed group tapping into real governance, corruption, impunity and underdevelopment grievances shared by most people in the region (Africa Report, 2014, p. i). Africa Report further asserts that Boko Haram is both a serious challenge and manifestation of more profound threats to Nigeria's security. Unless the federal and state governments and the region develop and implement comprehensive plans to tackle not only insecurity but also the injustices that drive much of the troubles, Boko Haram, or groups like it, will continue to destabilise large parts of the country.

Apart from the Boko Haram insurgency, there are several other security threats to life in the country. There is presently armed banditry and cattle rustling simultaneously ravaging the North Western States of Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara which is a serious threat to life of the citizens. Elsewhere in the Southern parts of the country, kidnapping and cultism have been on the rise every day while there are cases of farmers-herdsmen clashes in Taraba, Nasarawa, Benue and Plateau States which has made the region chaotic for a peaceful living and grave threat to food security in these states. Yet, the government's response is largely military, and the political will to do more than that appears entirely deficient requiring broad exploration of ideas and strategies to mitigate the surge.

Drama, Theatre and the New Media in Search of Peace in Nigeria

The role of drama and theatre in search of peace in Nigeria cannot be underestimated. African artistic life especially through the Community Theatre has been one that has always been used to proffer solutions to nagging issues among the rural people within their social milieu. Thus art is seen as a form of communication by aesthetic means to the people to mirror their social reality in ways that summon their perspectives towards sustaining peace and moral standards. Bakare (2013, p.4) maintains that all forms of artistic practices that avail in Africa are approached from the form and content perspectives. He maintains that Africans did not use their art for only aesthetic reasons, but their art centred on their entire life. It is a combination of form and content. Therefore, African art is seen as art for life against Eurocentric belief in art for art sake.

Therefore, while Nigeria searches for peace, drama can never be overlooked. This is even as drama has the potential to conjugate complex processes where the most diverse human expressions are addressed, as they have the ability to join the three compositional cores of a persona: cognition, emotion, and body. And to achieve this more successfully in an internet based world, there must be a synergy between art and science to evolve a strategy to communicate ideas that promote the needed peace. When the social media platforms like You Tube, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, etc. are properly engaged, performing arts can function as devices that enable verbal expression, enriching the expressive capacities of vulnerable, stigmatised, and silenced collectives as well as stimulate them to action. Consequently, drama and theatre can be understood as tools for empowerment, acknowledged as a "process of insubordination and an attempt of defeating individual and social oppressive structures" (Torres, 2009, p.97). Performing art unleashes the conquest of social and cultural rights since it allows an appreciation of people as subjects of their own experience, both aesthetic and educational (Boal,1985, p.24).

The performing art has severally been adopted by theatre scholars and dramatists to suggest

solutions to problems to government and stakeholders through its Community Theatre approach. In the present computer and digital age, there is a need for a new form of reorientation for an inclusion of the computer based innovative platforms while the search for peace is intensified. Play creators can harness the potential of the new media by recording and uploading their works on social media platforms stressing participation, critical consciousness, sensitisation and social transformation while stimulating dialogue within the people using their own familiar artistic expressions to the extent that they take positive action towards the improvement of their lives in the interest of communal stability and nation building. Tsaku and Embu (2015, p.15) state that with drama and theatre communities are able to identify their needs, the type of development they desire, the place of development and the means of attaining such a development. This is why a viral spread of security-conscious play skits and productions on social media is argued to be a massive step in the fight against insecurity.

Through the use of the new media, drama and theatre would expand and adopt innovative criteria to communicate to her new audience while addressing national issues of security concern. Theatre practitioners have, overtime, engaged drama by involving the local people to participate in plays that reflect their social reality. With the new media, these creative output could be recorded and transmitted to a variety of audience who would not only relate with issues affecting them but through the interactive potential these platforms present, feedbacks and solutions from the remote victims of these crises and crimes would be gathered and gainfully utilised by security operatives in the quest to cause peace across the country.

The efficacy of these platforms is more audacious as people of diverse backgrounds are usually united by social media giving everybody, irrespective of social status, an opportunity to contribute their voice on the causes, consequences and solutions to a given social issue of national concern. People in remote villages now through the social media are able to instantly access information on socio-political events around them within the comfort of their rooms through mobile phones, personal computers, tablets and so on. The implication of this is that when drama skits on nagging security issues are created and uploaded on social media platforms, they may go viral within a short time generating reactions that would be harnessed by stakeholders in the quest for peace. Thus, there could be a symbiotic relationship between drama, theatre and the new media as a way forward for the management of security crisis in Nigeria.

Stand-Up comedians and the entertainment industry generally have since gainfully engaged the social media to promote their trade. The new media is therefore a reservoir of infinite solution to national problems, growth and development. It is startlingly available for exploration to suit a given problem. Many social media users have leveraged these potential for selfish reasons and propaganda. Interestingly, all these are achieved through drama as the audience is aroused through graphic representations of events thereby generating emotions and counter reactions that promote a targeted agenda. Engaging drama and theatre in the business of peace building initiative through the new media can be useful if theatre practitioners, dramatists and security stakeholders exploit effectively the potential they generate.

The new media therefore has a compelling significance in search of peace. And at the heart of this compelling significance is the instrumentality of drama and theatre as these animate the efficacy and veracity of these burgeoning ideas posed by information and communication technology. The interactivity feature of the social media platforms would make it more advantageous to stakeholders as they would have access to uncensored firsthand information concerning security issues which may have been repealed or censored by conventional media for professional ethical concerns. Using the comment feature, users freely communicate their views, experiences, perspectives, suggestions and the general knowledge of a security crisis without

duress. This can be valuable to security operatives to evolve a comprehensive security management strategy.

Art can help to develop a critical visual literacy, which is undoubtedly necessary in a world that is increasingly filled with visual stimulus. Today, more than ever, it is essential to incorporate new content to the security management criteria at generating willful contributions from members of the public devoid of prejudice. Another advantage of social media contents uploaded by dramatists to educate people about security issues around them is that the security operatives can gather useful information towards resolving the crisis from affected parties freely through the comment section as both parties argue online. Drama, theatre and the new media are three dialectic moments that arrive at their final synthesis in security management through art, in which art is the content, the medium, and the purpose while the new media is the visual path to public literacy. Within this context, the arts can work as a critical device for empowerment and the deployment of security operatives in vulnerable contexts. Guijarro (2018, p.6) also argue that it is urgent to find innovative formulas that break with the traditional educational structure while answering to the new problems that societies are facing: the criminalisation of youth, anomie, new forms of violence, and aggravation of social gaps. Thus the adoption of the performing art in addressing security challenges in Nigeria could contribute to the critical transformation of the society and to the reduction of social vulnerability in a beleaguered state.

The synergy between drama, theatre and the new media could play the same function as Community Theatre or Theatre for Development. This approach creates a democratic process where the community members are involved in identifying and resolving their vast community needs and problem militating against their growth and development in willful pragmatic approach. The opportunity this perspective provides is that it mobilises community action and collective responsibility. Also the people hope to become more challenged and committed to initiate structures and execute programmes that make meaning to them through Theatre for Development practice (Tsaku & Embu, 2015, p.14). Similarly, the new media is capable of providing those structures that summon people's opinions on public issues that affect them. It can supply uncensored intelligence to obtaining information about a crisis threatening public security. The crisis response strategies are the *symbolic* resources which would shape attributions of responsibility for the crisis, change public perceptions about the organisation in crisis and reduce the negative impact caused by the crisis.

The media, both traditional and new media, play a strong role in the way a crisis blazes and its management. Tam and Huang (2016, p.79) argue that in spite of the emergence of new and social media, traditional media coverage continues to play a significant role in influencing crisis reactions; the public is the most likely to discuss and share information about a crisis based on what is reported in traditional media coverage. Thus, how the conventional media report a crisis, in terms of what they choose to include and exclude in their coverage of a crisis, could affect whether or not the crisis response strategies selected by security operatives could achieve the desired outcome of minimising the negative impact of a crisis. However, with the new media through the social media, both the public and the security operatives stand a chance to access information on a crisis in firsthand reportage by either eyewitnesses or the victims of the crisis directly. Plays that could depict these crises in a creative dexterity thematically designed to provide answers to a lingering crisis could facilitate proper management of the crisis. The new media thus serves as a willing platform to disseminate these creative products to the public with even a broader coverage.

Conclusion

The security crisis in Nigeria has reached the peak where everyone is directly or indirectly affected. Members of the public stare helplessly at the

government to provide solutions to their plights. The government tasks her security apparatus to restore peace. The security operatives are practically overstretched beyond genuine action in their bid to fathom peace exploring all strategies to achieve this goal. Many have even alluded that they are bereft of ideas at the detriment of the public. As it stands, there is a tripartite demand as the search for peace lingers on. The misery this chaotic security quagmire creates in Nigeria requires a total approach across fields. Drama and theatre which have been deployed as a means of conscientising the people about issues around them have not been adequately utilised by security stakeholders as they yearn for peace. Again, the new media which have proven to proliferate messages even in crisis situation have not been adequately harnessed as the search for peace lasts. It is the belief of this study that the engagement of drama and theatre with the new media in the search for peace would yield a positive result. As Bakare (2013, p.11) notes art is a creative, proactive, meditative and constructive apparatus, responsible for restoring societal peace when the latter becomes ruptured in the cruel grip of political, ethnic, religious or economic crisis, especially in an atmosphere like our present-day Nigeria. Creative art takes on the offensive as a direct palliative or antidote to the aforementioned forms of conflicts with their attendant destructive, chaotic and counter-productive effects on the society. The submission of this study is that while the role of drama and theatre in search for peace is efficaciously evident, the new media now provide a fertile ground for it to thrive.

Recommendations

Art has always been a creative way of projecting societal misdemeanours to engender change. The fusion of art and science through the social media platforms could be a meaningful tool in the management of crisis in Nigeria. Therefore the study makes the following recommendations:

i. Despite the potential of drama and theatre in proffering solutions to societal problems, the art is seemingly ignored in the search for peace. Therefore, the government and her security formations should engage drama and theatre in this desperate search to restore peace across the country.
ii. Dramatists and theatre scholars should avail themselves of the potential presented by the new media through social media platforms to produce and upload contents that present Nigerian security crises to complement the efforts of the security operatives in the search for peace.
iii. Security operatives should equally engage artists who would create contents that would be uploaded on dedicated pages of social media platforms closely monitored to gather information that would assist in finding subtle solutions to resolving some of these crises.

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